/11 cont./

682 killed under the obligation of killing either the murderer or one of the latter's relatives. A blood-feud passes from generation to generation and is a person's sacred duty; unavenged blood is considered a shame and a disgrace for the living relatives of the person killed. The Abkhaz believe that if for some reason or other blood remains unavenged, it will avenge itself.

[628] In case the killer himself managed to escape, a relative of his was held responsible; he was killed, captured, or robbed and finally ruined. Even the killing of the meanest slave often led to clashes involving whole villages; if a mutual understanding and peace were not restored among them, the result of such a feud would be that one of the villages had to face ruin or move away to another place.

682 565 In blood-feuds the descent of the persons involved played an important role. If, for instance, a prince killed a peasant, the relatives of the latter had no right to avenge the blood of the killed upon the killer, for "the blood of a peasant is not equal to that of a prince." Therefore, instead of the prince himself, [608] it was his foster father who had to pay for the blood shed by the prince.

There were different settlements for the blood of a peasant, a nobleman, or a prince.

Although the personal qualities of a man commanded /12/ special attention in Abkhazia the blood of a peasant was nevertheless valued lower than the blood of a nobleman, and that of the latter lower than the blood of a prince. For instance, if the blood of a peasant was valued at five human souls, then the blood of a nobleman was worth three times more, and that of a prince five times more than the blood of a peasant. The price [435] of a life was determined in terms of spans /pyad'/. A soul (person) four spans tall was valued at 30 cows or 30 rubles in silver; one of five spans, 50 cows or 50 silver rubles; and one of six spans, 70 cows or 70 rubles in silver. Arms and clothing were added as supplementary payment. Blood was paid off with cows, goats, sheep, and beehives. The number of the latter was determined on the basis of the value of a cow.

/12 cont./

682 426 If the blood-price was not paid within a certain period, then at the end of the year, in place of a debt of four spans, five were owed, in place of five, six, and six became seven, so that an already considerable debt increased still more and weighed like a heavy burden on the shoulders of the debtor. But the Abkhaz had one excellent custom -- that of coming to the aid of an insolvent debtor. All the latter had to do was to announce that he "owed for blood," and everybody contributed his mite to pay off the debt.

796 682 608 The following ceremony was considered the best way to a complete reconciliation of the parties involved in a blood-feud. A relative of the killer gave a banquet and, through intermediaries, invited the claimant of blood himself or his son. It was sufficient to persuade the claimant of blood to touch his lips to the breast of the wife or mother of the debtor, and, as a result of this action alone, everlasting and indissoluble peace would be restored between them. If, on the other hand, the blood-avenger would not be appeased and would not come to the feast, then those acting for the other side endeavored to abduct the son or some other close relative of the claimant or in some other way get such a person into their house. If they succeeded, then peace was restored whether the avenger liked it or not, for to kill the foster father was considered a violation and desecration of the "breast" and 186 beneath the dignity of a brave man. Love of homeland is developed to the highest degree in the Abkhaz. Some peoples say, ubi bene, ibi patria, but the Abkhaz, on the other hand, prays: "There is no better place in the world than Abkhazia. God, save Abkhazia." In both grief and happiness alike, the Abkhaz repeats this prayer.

574 As is the case with all ancient peoples, hospitality is piously honored and maintained in Abkhazia. The Abkhaz is convinced that every guest is accompanied by seven "baraka" (blessing, /13/ bliss, abundance), one of which remains with the host, and God gives back to the guest this seventh baraka. Even the poorest Abkhaz does his utmost to treat his guest as well as possible; when an Abkhaz sees a traveler going along the village

/13 cont./

576 enter a house is decided with the same ceremoniousness. Or, for example, when two horsemen meet each other in the forest. If the younger of the two has something to say to the older one, he must dismount and speak while standing on the ground. At that point, the older one urges him to speak without dismounting.

/14/ The language of the Abkhaz also bears witness to their politeness. In conversation they often use such expressions as: "I ask that your sickness will pass on to me," "may I become the victim of your sicknesses," "may I be the victim instead of you," "may I go around the place where you are lying," etc. In keeping with this last expression, an Abkhaz woman, when visiting her sick foster-child or a person she has not seen for a [608] [755] long time, walks three times around him with the words, "utsge mtsuge seizgat," i.e. "may I carry away your sickness, your misfortune."

For every occasion in life, the Abkhaz has a special greeting, in which are expressed his wishes for prosperity, strength, victory, fertility, profit, etc. In this repertoire of various Abkhaz greetings, there are even some which are especially meant for occasions when one meets persons who are going to a horse-race, greetings for the person who is arranging 181 the races, and so forth. And this is quite understandable and natural for a people such as the Abkhaz, for whom horse and arms constitute the most beloved things, which they have been accustomed to value highly almost from the cradle. The children [565] of members of the upper classes in the very first years of their lives become excellent riders and weapon-bearers. Pistol, [411] dagger, saber, knife, and a whole arsenal of weapons are the [293] constant adornment of every Abkhaz man. For him there is no greater pleasure than to ride armed from head to foot, a burka thrown over him, in the company of his comrades, singing a merry song. Without a horse and arms, life is not worth living to an Abkhaz!

526 Besides horse-races and trick-riding, the following games [541] are worth noting in the life of the Abkhaz: 1. the ball-game, 538 2. arkil-riki, and 3. stone-throwing. The folk-music and folk-poetry of the Abkhaz are extremely meager.

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III.

Education -- The Educated -- The Educators

565 While the upper class in Abkhazia enjoyed privilege and
566 power, the situation of the lower classes was one of great oppression; /19/ the batoni (master, feudal lord) looked upon his subject, his slave, as a commodity; he could sell or pawn him
[567] according to circumstances. However, even after the abolition
[579] of slavery, the position of the peasantry did not improve, due to the fact that the nobility did not cease from robbery and pillage and plunder until the most recent times.

565 Under such a state of affairs, all the peasantry could do
608 was to resign itself to feudal conditions and try, wherever possible, to get protection. The best method lay in the custom of adoption, or the rearing of the sons of the aristocrats by the peasants. Thanks to this custom, the aristocrats themselves were strengthened, for in this way they gained in the peasants their most faithful supporters, while at the same time freeing their wives from the onerous duty of bringing up and feeding their own children. This is the reason that in all Abkhazia there is not a single peasant who has not reared one or several princes and nobles; as a consequence of this custom, hardly one per cent of the nobles have been nursed at their own mother's breast.

Before the beginning of childbirth in a family of the aristocracy (didebuli), on the one hand relatives and acquaintances and, on the other hand, the future foster-mothers of the expected child, accompanied by their husbands and female relatives in order to be able to bear the newborn foster-child back to their village with due ceremony, begin to gather around the pregnant
344 woman. During the childbirth, girls from the village also come to
565 visit the expectant mother in order to distract her and to relieve
[533] her sufferings during labor with gay songs and the telling of fables
[538] and fairy tales. The husband is absent during this time. According to the customs of the country, he is not allowed to be present when his wife gives birth and therefore leaves the home. Above

/19 cont./

844 565 the bed of the expectant mother a cord is suspended from the ceiling, which she can grasp during the severe pains and spasms of childbirth. It is indecent for her to let her moans and screams reach the ears of her parents-in-law; she must staunchly bear her sufferings so as not to lose their respect forever. At last the child is delivered. The birth of a boy brings more joy to the [842] mother than the birth of a girl, as it gives her more respect and honor in the eyes of society, but she is not particularly saddened by the birth of a daughter either, for it still serves as proof of her fertility. The newborn child is left in the care of the wet nurse [608] [853] (the wife of the foster father), and the female relatives congratulate the new mother on the happy /20/ outcome of the delivery. The mother, too, is happy, and most of all, of course, because with the passing of the baby into the care of others she herself will soon recover and, free from caring for it, can more easily preserve her beauty and freshness of face. In a few days her husband returns and in his turn congratulates her on the delivery of her child (1).

1. Cf. the excellent article, "Abkhazia," by K. Machavariani in the newspaper Iveriia, 1884, No. 275.

608 565 On the day set for the departure of the wet nurse with the newborn baby, the parents give a banquet and give her the materials for a dress, for underwear, and for all the appurtenances for the child's cradle, a copper kettle to bathe it in, and other small articles.

From this day on the foster mother receives the honorary title of anadzdzei (nurse, foster mother), and both she and her husband, the abadzdzei (foster father), are held in universal respect; upon its entry into the house of the foster father and mother, the baby is recognized as a ward (akhupha) of the family to which the foster father belongs.

The foster parents cherish the child in due fashion and maintain him in comfort and contentment. After two or three [431] years the child is taken to its parents, along with presents consisting of one or two bulls, a goat, capons, wine, bread, etc.

/20 cont./

565 608 In the house of the child's parents, another banquet is held, to which the neighbors are also invited. On this occasion all kinds of honors are shown to the foster mother and her husband. The foster parents are granted the right to be the first to wash their hands, and upon their return home the parents of the child must seat them on their horses, i.e., when they mount, the stirrups on the other side must be held. The foster parents return home with [431] the child, loaded with all kinds of presents, animals, clothes, money.

The foster child remains with the foster parents during the course of eight or nine years, and then it is taken to the real parents. It hardly need be said that the child, having spent its early years in someone else's home, where it grew up and learned to walk, talk, and to love its foster mother and those surroundings, now has difficulty in adjusting itself to the new situation -- at [154] first the father's house seems almost like a prison to him. For this reason the child is allowed to visit the foster parents frequently. If the foster child is an orphan, however, he remains in the home and under the care of his foster parents until he is married.

/21/ The foster child is obligated to defend the interests of the foster parents, i.e. of that family whose members reared him. He is required, for instance, to search for a lost article belonging to his foster parents, to find the thief and to call him to account, and it is a great disgrace to him if he is unable to do this. In the same way, if someone offends the foster parents and they are not strong enough to pay back the insult, their ward must stand up for them. Let us suppose, for instance, that some prince has beaten a peasant. In this case the ward of the injured peasant must de- [683] mand satisfaction, not from the princely offender himself, for "his blood is unequal to that of a peasant," but from his foster parent, a peasant, and he is the one who has to answer for the insult inflicted upon the foster parent of another prince. If a peasant foster-father gets into any kind of trouble, his princely ward endeavors by hook or by crook to rescue him from his difficulties. In such cases, if the ward himself is still immature and unable to help his foster parents, then his parents act in his place.

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565 608 This, however, does not exhaust the role of the ward with regard to his foster parent. He is the main character in the joys and sorrows of his foster parent; in all the occasions of his life that have any importance. Thus, when his foster mother, or her [765] husband, or one of their children dies, he bewails them bitterly, dresses in mourning, lets his hair grow, buys the coffin at his own [764] expense, and takes care of the arrangements and the ceremonial for the mourning and the funeral of the deceased. When the funeral banquet is given, he provides a sheep or a horse and again arranges everything. The ward also is the main character [583] when the son of his foster mother abducts a girl to be his wife; if the relatives of the girl pursue the abductor, the princely ward comes to his aid with words and weapons and does not give up the abducted girl; subsequently he keeps her at his house until the matter is definitely settled, for none of the relatives of the abducted girl would dare to attack his home.

If, on the other hand, the marriage of the son or daughter [584] of the foster father is arranged peacefully by the voluntary consent of both sides, then here, too, the princely ward is considered the bridegroom's best man and presents the bride with money, a horse, etc.

The foster parents in turn do not fail to perform their duties with regard to their ward, whom they call their sun, their /22/ sacredness, and by whose name they swear. Every year at [431] Christmastide they give him presents, such as cheese, capons, and bread; at Easter, a lamb or a kid and "chumukhkvati." These presents are the obligatory outward signs of sincere liking and friendship on the part of lesser ones ("lower brotherhood") towards those of higher rank; with their cessation the mutual friendship is also broken off.

The sons of the foster mother are usually the bosom friends [579] and accomplices of the ward in his nocturnal thieving adventures. That is why a prince or nobleman always takes the sons of his foster mother with him on his thieving expeditions; he knows that

/22 cont./

565 they are prepared to sacrifice their lives for him if necessary.
608
[579] When a ward dies, the grief and sorrow of the foster parents are unbounded; for his funeral they furnish a shroud and money;
[764] they also bring one or two bulls, sheep, etc. for the funeral
[765] repast for the deceased. When their ward marries, they give him all kinds of assistance through their personal labor. They
[585] also present him with fattened animals and bring presents to his bride as well.

608 Among the Abkhaz another type of wardship also exists,
565 namely, that of an adult man being invited to assume the role
796 of ward. The Abkhaz peasant invites such a man with the words, "I wish to take you into my house and honor you according to my means." On the appointed day, the person invited goes to the house of his future foster father and takes along a few additional people. During the supper the host and his relatives kneel down in front of their ward-to-be and give him a glass of wine; they then stand and one of them addresses to him the following speech: "From this day on we regard you as having been nursed in our family; we are of the same spirit as you and will begrudge you nothing; we hope that you, too, will begrudge us nothing; you will be held in higher esteem than the other wards." After this they present him with a few rubles and give something to his companions (khadzh /see foreign text/). While handing over the presents, they say, "Vadcha enup" (a present for you). This ceremony ends in the following way: on a carpet, spread on the floor, a chest is placed, on which the wife of the host of the house, i.e., the future foster mother, seats herself; the other women surround her. Then the ward-to-be enters through the open door, stands in front of the hostess seated on the chest, greets her, /23/ and thrice touches with his lips the nipple of her breast, or, as the Abkhaz say, "bites her nipples three times"; after each time he repeats, "from this day on you are my own mother." And indeed, from
608 this time on exactly the same mutual relations obtain between
565 them as in the first case where another's child is fully reared. It need hardly be said that, besides the princes and nobles, the

/23 cont./

608 565 peasants also rear the children of clergymen, of merchants, and even of other peasants. There are also cases of even nobles taking in and rearing the sons of strong and influential princes on the same basis.

IV.

Marriage

583 Some fifteen years ago the groom usually abducted a girl for a wife; that is to say, without the consent of the girl's parents or her own consent, he carried out an attack upon her with the help of his comrades and led her away by force. Such cases are rare nowadays. On the contrary, abductions are now for the greater part carried out with the consent of the bride herself, though not infrequently against the will of her parents. In the latter case, the one chosen as a bride comes at night to a previously arranged place a few versts from the parental home. The groom comes to the same place with his comrades, on horses. She mounts a horse brought especially for her, and the whole cavalcade gallops back to the home of the groom or to that of some influential person. No pursuers are able to take the bride away from the abductors, for they are prepared, if necessary, to fight to the last drop of blood for her. Soon after the abduction the girl herself announces publicly that the abduction took place according to her personal wishes and that she can be happy only with her abductor. Mutual negotiations are now [584] initiated and everything ends in peace; the son-in-law brings presents to the mother and the father of the bride, and the case is closed.

584 583 [558] It must be noted that the Abkhaz never abducts a girl lower in standing than himself. This would be considered a loss of honor for the abductor. On the contrary, everybody tries to abduct a girl of higher or at least equal birth. To propose to a [154] girl and to receive a refusal either from her or from her parents

/27 cont./

764 [203] to come to the mourning ceremony without being invited. The deceased is put in a coffin. The women in mourning apparel, barefooted, their dresses torn, bloody scratches on their faces, and their hair loose, arrange themselves behind the coffin. From the other side the male and female mourners approach the coffin. The arrangement of the lamentations is as follows. Let us suppose that four or five women are coming to bewail the deceased. As soon as they enter the yard, they immediately start weeping and shouting "avav," and at the same time they put their fingers to their temples and continue to scratch their faces with them down to the chin until they have finished their "avav." The women sitting by the coffin answer their "avav" with the same exclamation. The mourners slowly approach the house. Their wails and sobs gradually become louder; finally they enter the house, where the real communal mourning takes place. The mourners enter the house, beating their foreheads and breasts; they kneel down before the coffin and thus bewail the deceased.

In another part of the house the belongings of the deceased are put on display, his clothes and his weapons. After the mourning of the deceased, weeping and sobbing are done over his belongings also.

Sympathy for the relatives of the deceased is expressed by [195] visitors in the following manner: "Had this but not happened to you; had you but heard of my death instead, etc."

764 /28/ The foster mother of the deceased or her children, •608 when they come to bewail the ward, break out in wails and cries even a verst from the house. In the yard they are met by people who have been stationed there for this purpose and who lead them by the hand into the house. This does not prevent the new arrivals from scratching their cheeks and necks on the way until they bleed, nor from beating their heads against the house-posts until they fall down before the coffin half-dead and with tears flowing. The foster father and his children likewise beat their heads and faces.

764 On the day of the funeral, lamentation for the deceased is [1965] general. Then, after the mourning, a funeral repast is arranged and all the guests are treated to bread, wine, and lenten fare, and by evening the deceased is buried.

C 627 [771 cont.]

Law. Blood vengeance is still practiced among the Cherkess (t'li'lvasa = blood price) and Abkhaz.

A 2 [608] Formerly when a prince had struck down a peasant, his relatives could not avenge themselves on him, but rather on his foster father (cf. p. 20). The wergild was measured in "souls" according to rank, and in spans according to the size of the body; the unit of value for this was one cow (cf. p. 747 [untranslated]). A "soul" of four spans was compensated for with 30 cows, a soul of five spans with 50 cows, of six spans with 70 cows; a peasant was reckoned at five souls, a nobleman at 15 souls, a prince at 25. The wergild consisted of cows, goats, sheep, and beehives; it was increased by one span if not paid on time. If the avenger was inclined to forgivesness, he confirmed it by kissing the breast of the guilty man's mother or wife (cf. above, p. 15).

C 685 Among the Cherkess theft was expiated in the same way as among the Khevsur. The thief had to return the stolen goods and thirty oxen as well to a nobleman, and to a prince he had to replace it ninefold.

A 592 428 When there is a division of an Abkhaz kin group, the father of the house and the mother receive half of the total property; if the father is already dead, the mother receives the dowry [Mitgift] that has been brought in and [772] an equal portion from each son. The oldest son has a right of priority (ai'ab-šakhu) in division or inheritance, and likewise--as among the Osset--the youngest (eidzb-šakhu); the farm, among other things, falls to the latter, the rest being equally divided among the other children, with the daughters receiving less. Among

C 593 the Cherkess the eldest son had to care for his unmarried sisters; for this he received the bride-money (see p. 16) when he had them marry.

A 782 A peculiar oath of purgation is customary among the Abkhaz; the accused strikes the anvil three times with the hammer in the smithy and says that the god of the smiths may smash his head if he is guilty. Or he goes [Fig. 452 appears here] between two loaded rifles three times and challenges the god to shoot him in the head if he is lying.

3: Janashia I-5 (ca. 1900) 1937 RI3 Abkhas RI3
Adzvibzhq

6. *Akhyə Zoshən*

The Abkhasians ascribe diseases generally to supernatural influences or gods, but some diseases have their own special gods. The god of small-pox, for example, is *Akhyə Zoshən* (the golden Zoskhan), and also his consort, the goddess *Khania Shkwdkwa* (Khania the white). How important are the gods of the Abkhasians may be judged from the following circumstance which took place during the spring of 1914 in one of the settlements of the village Jgerdi. Throughout the winter and spring of the year Abkhasia was in the grip of a severe epidemic of small-pox. In order to check the spread of the disease vaccinators were sent to the affected areas. The following account of what happened was described to me by P. Janashia, one of the vaccinators. A certain settlement, fearing that the gods might wreak vengeance upon them, refused to admit the vaccinators; they preferred to safeguard themselves against this terrible disease, *atswarp'shdzə* (small-pox), by the adoption of the gods. *Atswə* denotes skin, rind, and *ap'shdzə*, pretty, beautiful; the whole, in translation, denoting "that which decorates (beautifies) the skin".

By pooling their resources, the settlement raised enough money to buy a couple of snow-white goats and a sufficiency of provisions, and made an expedition into the forest. Here, amidst the quietude and peace of over-hanging leaves, a sumptuous feast was prepared for the divine guests. When everything was ready, and the victim had been placed, according to custom, on *ashwamkyadə*, the head of the settlement said the prayer and made the offering to the gods. Nearby stood two bedsteads, adorned with silk bedclothes, on which sat two young women, an *amauri* and a peasant woman; their naked breasts were covered with silk handkerchiefs. The whole assembly knelt down, while the head of the settlement implored the gods to accept their offering by kissing the breasts of the most beautiful women of the settlement, and thus become, in accordance with the ancestral custom, adopted sons of the settlement. Near the "foster-mothers of gods" stood two of the finest horses, one with a side saddle. The sumptuous feast followed the ceremony of adoption, and afterwards the people, holding the horses by the bridle, on which were to be riding the newly adopted gods, *Akhyə Zoshən* and *Khania Shkwdkwa*, escorted the precious guests to the accompaniment of song, far away from the settlement. Thus they "turned away", or warded off, the small-pox.

"You may not believe it," an Abkhaz from the settlement told me, "but this 'adoption' saved us from the small-pox; not one of us fell a victim to it. You, the learned, have caused our ruin by bringing down upon us the anger of the gods of our fathers," he concluded, with a deep sigh.